



Gold Rush Student Activity

Gold Rush Animals

At our Gold Rush Museum, a large mural depicts a scene from the early days of the Gold Rush. Dotted throughout the picture are over 30 animals.

Animals in Placer County have meant different things to different groups of people for thousands of years. For the native people, who suffered large losses during the California Gold Rush, animals were an important resource and essential to cultural practices.

For early settlers and miners, animals were important for survival but could also be challenging and dangerous.



How do you think native California animals were affected and used by miners?

Deer & Rabbit: Deer and other game were hunted by local native tribes before miners hunted them for meat and fur during the Gold Rush. Their numbers decreased from 1800 to 1850.

Grizzly Bear: The California Grizzly Bear was still alive during the Gold Rush. It could grow over a thousand pounds and easily kill a miner. They were hunted to extinction. The grizzly bear is on the California State flag.



Rattlesnake: Rattlesnakes were found in North and South America. Miners from different countries may have seen snakes, but not this venomous species.

How do you think different jobs during the Gold Rush would have used animals or animal products?

Stagecoach Driver: Horses and mules were used to haul passengers, mail, freight, and bullion across the gold field. The tack, or the equipment used to control the horse, was made from leather.



Can you draw a horse or stagecoach?

Farmer: Like the stagecoach drivers, farmers needed horses, mules, and other animals to do work on the farm. Farmers also used tools made from leather.



Can you draw a farm?

What animals were brought to California during the Gold Rush?

Oxen: Coming overland required the strength of oxen to pull wagons. Oxen were also used to haul supplies at lumber mills, quarries, and farms.



Horses and Mules: Moving around the gold fields could prove difficult and dangerous. Horses and mules were used to pack in supplies to distant mining camps, and to carry passengers on stagecoaches.



Exotic Animals: Early in California's history, exotic animals were shipped to the state. With so many people in California, it was hard to feed everyone. Galapagos tortoises, sea turtles, turkeys, and Atlantic cod were imported to feed the miners. A shipload of cats was even imported from Mexico to fight a rat infestation in San Francisco.

In Placer County, miners were treated to circus groups for entertainment.



Imagine if you moved from New York to California in 1866...



New York City, 1863



Auburn, 1866

Do you think you would worry about new animals in California?

What animals do you think you would find in California, and not in New York City?

P N F P A H D K X C O R
R A C C O O N O C M A L
C N B C G J F A E T B E
R X V R N Y J I T U O R
R E D N A M A L A S B R
J T E R W E E N R K C I
K X G D C S B A M J A U
E W D G N O B K C I T Q
A T I A W B U H C U B S
L I K L I A U G T A K F
A E E T O Y O C A I L P
S D S A W U Q U B R E B

Find the native California animals:

Black bear

Bobcat

Coyote

Deer

Gray fox

Rabbit

Rattlesnakes

Salamanders